

The Commoner.

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Our Sister Republic==Mexico

Have you ever visited the land of the Aztecs? If not you have a treat in store for you. And even those who have been there before find themselves unable to resist the temptation to return occasionally to enjoy again the fascinating beauty of the scenery and note the progress which the young republic to the south of us is making.

Having spent the holidays in Mexico I feel that the reader will pardon me for devoting a few columns to the subject—even more, he will expect it. Nowhere in the world can the tourist find so much variety in so limited a territory, and no country offers to the American so much of interest and of education at so small an expense. The Aztec ruins alone would repay a visit. They furnish conclusive proof of a civilization far in advance of that reached by the Indians farther north. Relics are being dug up constantly. We brought back to confound the republicans an Aztec god with gold and silver ornaments, showing that both metals were appreciated by the native Americans before the republican party was organized. There is about sixteen times as much silver as gold on the idol. While in the hot country near Tierra Blanca we dug into a mound and found numerous pieces of crockery and parts of figures.

The Santa Fe railroad makes connections at Milano, Tex., with the International, and that road passing through Austin and San Antonio connects with the Mexican National at Laredo. The Mexican National is the main line to Monterey, the most American of the Mexican cities, situated only 168 miles from the Rio Grande. Saltillo, the capital of Coahuila, one of the richest of the mining states, San Luis Potosi, one of the largest cities of the republic, Toluca, the progressive capital of the state of Mexico—the state out of which the federal district was carved—these are the main cities on this line between Monterey and the City of Mexico. The trip from the border to the capital traverses every variety of country from plain to valley and mountain. Among the principal large cities near the City of Mexico may be named Guadalajara, in the west central portion, one of the prettiest cities to be found anywhere; Aguas Calientes, named for the hot springs there; Guanajuato, which is noted for having one of the oldest silver mines, one of the handsomest theatres and the largest collection of mummies to be found on the continent, and Cuernavaca, just south of the City of Mexico, always of interest to tourists because of the private residence of Cortez, and now becoming famous as a health resort. Popocatepetl, one of the tallest peaks on this hemisphere, is seen to advantage from the Cuernavaca road.

The ride from the City of Mexico to Vera

Cruz over the Mexican railroad begins at an elevation of 7,348 feet. The ride up to Esperanza, 700 feet above, is through the valley of Mexico, where the main crops are wheat and corn. From the car window one can draw a contrast between the old methods and the new, for some still use horses to tramp out the wheat, while a few employ the American-made threshing machines. Here, too, the old plow closely resembling the crooked stick and drawn by oxen is fighting against the innovation of the modern plow.

In this great valley the maguey plant is also a conspicuous feature. The various fields are often separated by rows of the maguey, and where the fields are small the picture presented is an exceedingly attractive one. The maguey furnishes a variety of products—mescal, a kind of alcoholic drink used in the lower altitudes, is made from the roots of this plant, while pulque, the life-blood of the plant, the great drink of the plateau, is drawn from it at its maturity. Pulque looks like milk when diluted with water, and, when fresh, smells like yeast. It is carried in pig skins, and carloads of it find their way into the City of Mexico every morning. It will produce a genuine case of intoxication, and the habit when once formed is as hard to cure as the whisky habit. On New Year's day we visited a hacienda in the suburbs of the City of Mexico owned by General John B. Frisby, an American, who went to Mexico several years ago and who is now identified with many large business enterprises. Our attention was called to a dog there which had acquired a taste for pulque. He goes to the field twice a day and finds some maguey plant from which pulque is being extracted (the period of extraction covers several weeks) and gets his dram, and then he staggers back with red eyes and sleeps off the effect of the liquor. He has ceased to be of value as a shepherd dog, but he is still useful as a horrible example.

A part of the Frisby ranch has been converted into a dairy very successfully conducted by a man from Missouri who has imported into the country a large number of Jersey, Holstein and Brown Swiss cows. The dairy is a model of cleanliness and has proved profitable to its owners.

But I digress. After leaving Esperanza the descent to Vera Cruz on the Gulf, 112 miles distant, is begun. During the first seventeen miles of this trip the descent to Maltrata is about 2,500 feet and the scenery beautiful beyond description.

From Maltrata to Orizaba the distance is only thirteen miles, but the descent is something over 1,500 feet. From Orizaba the descent is a little more gradual, the fall of 1,300 feet being distributed over sixteen miles. At Cordova one sees tropical vegetation in all its luxuriance—oranges,

pine-apples, bananas, coffee, all at one time, and in the distance the snow-clad summit of Orizaba which rises nearly 17,370 feet above the level of the ocean.

From Cordova a new line called the Vera Cruz and Pacific, or as it is sometimes known, the Mason line, is just being completed to the isthmus. A branch from Tierra Blanca to Vera Cruz makes this a trans-continental line, and the improvement of the harbor at Vera Cruz will probably give it a considerable portion of the business across the isthmus. It also opens up fertile sugar, rice and grazing lands in southern Mexico.

West of the village of Tierra Blanca, just across the Amapa river, in the state of Oaxaca, we visited a rubber tree plantation. It was projected by Alfred Bishop Mason, a Chicago business man, but the work of development has fallen to his nephews, Raymond Willis and James Trowbridge, the former a graduate of the Boston Polytechnic and the latter of Yale. These young men began about three years ago the clearing of about four hundred acres of tropical forest, so dense that it was difficult to secure any accurate idea of the lay of the land. They now have about 300,000 rubber trees growing, the oldest two and a half years old. It will be four or five years before the plantation begins to yield a return, but there is at this time every promise of success. If the experiment realizes the hopes of the young men they will deserve the reward that they will secure, for they will not only make a fortune out of mother earth, but they will show others what can be accomplished in the development of this industry and thus become public benefactors. This well illustrates the difference between wealth created by the establishment of some new industry and wealth absorbed by trading or speculation.

For two years Willis and Trowbridge lived in a hut thatched with palm leaves, but last spring they began the erection of a commodious stone house, with wide and airy porches, and to this newly completed residence the former has recently brought his bride, a Wellesley graduate, to preside over this new center of American civilization.

Near Hacienda Yale, as this new plantation is called, is a low wooded mountain range where, as I was assured by Mr. Julio Tardos, who has a cattle ranch near, parrots, monkeys and even tigers can be found in their native haunts. But this I can only report from hearsay, for I did not have time to hunt parrots or monkeys and was not disposed to infringe upon the patent of those who find relief from the cares of state in the pursuit of the larger and more ferocious wild animals.

The history of Mexico reads like a novel. Prescott's description of its conquest by Cortez could hardly be credited but for the confirmation which one finds on every hand. The toilsome

The Old and the New

The Land of the Aztecs

How One May Get There

Where Wild Game Abounds

Scenery Beyond Compare